

Molding Playdough with two small children is no way for a thirteen-year-old to spend his Friday night, but the going rate for baby-sitting is five dollars an hour, and I really wanted a new telescope.

"Jeremy is mixing the blue with my red again!" screamed Marilyn. She is five and very bossy.

"Purple," whispered Jeremy. Even though he's three, he hardly talks. When he does talk, he usually only says one or two words.

"Let's quit this stupid game and eat our dessert," demanded Marilyn.

"I'm sorry, but we will have to clean up this mess first. We can't eat dessert on a dirty table."

"You clean it up. I quit, so I don't have to clean up. That's the rule in our house," Marilyn said defiantly.

"Marilyn, children who don't clean up must go to bed without any dessert," I said, trying to sound authoritative.

She glared at me out of the corner of her eye the whole time she was stuffing the Playdough into the tiny tubs. I was just relieved she didn't throw a tantrum. By the time we had put all of the Playdough away and wiped the table, Marilyn had forgotten that she was angry with me.

"Can we have Popsicles for dessert, Michael?" she asked. I hate it when they eat popsicles. They let the popsicles melt all over the place. It's almost as though they think the more slippery and soggy it is, the more delicious it tastes.

"Why don't we try one of the yummy brownies from the bakery?" I said. For one thing, brownies are cleaner. More importantly, brownies are what I wanted for dessert.

"How about it, Jeremy? Want a brownie for dessert?" I asked.

"Waffles," said Jeremy. Even though he only says one word at a time, he gets his point across.

"It's too late to make waffles, Jeremy," Marilyn snapped. "I know! Let's have a brownie with ice cream on top!"

For once, I actually liked one of Marilyn's ideas. Maybe she's not so bad after all. Jeremy didn't argue, so brownies with ice cream it was.

After we finished eating brownies a la mode, it was time for bed. I always read them a story at bedtime, and Marilyn always picks the longest book she can find so that she can stay up later.

"Look, Marilyn," I began, "it is already 8:30, and you were supposed to be asleep at 8:00. It's either a short story or no story at all." Lucky for me she can't tell time yet. Strangely enough, she didn't fuss about it. I was relieved to get by with one short story.

The Websters didn't get home until almost midnight, and I had fallen asleep. I stretched groggily as Mrs. Webster searched through her purse.

"Did they give you any trouble?" Mrs. Webster asked as she got some money out of her purse.

"Not a bit," I found myself answering, even if it wasn't the whole truth. It was always easier to fudge the truth just a little bit, instead of having to tell the whole, complicated truth. And, really, parents just want to hear that no one was severely injured.

I hastily said goodnight and started out the front door, happy to be heading home. As I walked across the street toward my house, I gazed at the stars, knowing that the twenty dollars in my pocket would bring them that much closer to me.

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"I'm sorry, but we will have to clean up this mess first. We can't	102
eat dessert on a dirty table."	108
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